

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Front-End EVALUATION

**SAGAMORE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE:
OLD ORCHARD VISITOR CENTER EXHIBITS**

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INTRODUCTION

Over a period of two days a front-end evaluation was carried out consisting of three focus group sessions conducted by the project evaluation consultant. The Friday, June 4 focus group was carried out with a 3rd grade class of children at the Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School in Oyster Bay, NY. The two Saturday, June 5 focus groups were conducted at the Sagamore Hill site and consisted of a small casual visitor family group and a large Harvard University alumni adult tour group.

To supplement the focus groups, a Self-Rating Form was administered to all participants in which they were asked to indicate the relative importance of various topics and content areas that could be included in an exhibit about a famous person.

This report is divided into three sections, the first presenting the results of the administration of the Self-Rating Forms, the second containing results of the three focus group sessions, and the third containing recommendations based on the findings from these data sources.

SELF RATING FORM RESULTS

The results from the administration of the Self-Rating Form to each focus group are shown in Tables 1 through 3, and the combined results from all three groups are shown in Table 4. The highlights from each of these sets of data are discussed below, although it is recommended that members of the project team look at all the data so that they may "capture" the full range of information they provide.

In all three of the individual tables of results, the relatively small sample size makes any kind of generalizations to the population as a whole problematic. It is for this reason that the entries in each cell of these three tables are the actual number giving each answer, and not percentages. However, in Table 4, which combines the data from all three groups and thus has a respectable number of participants (52), percentages have been used for the individual table entries.

3rd Grade Students (Table 1)

A total of 22 students from a single class participated in this focus group, with 9 girls and 13 boys. It should be noted that the preferred school-age group was planned to be selected from either a Junior HS or HS class and the Self-Rating Form was designed with that level of academic achievement in mind. Consequently, it was necessary to define for these children a number of the items used in the form (e.g., "Scandals") and the results are thus cast in some doubt as to their usefulness. ' Also, children at this age level usually attend museums and exhibits with school groups, parents, or other adults, which makes them a special kind of casual visitor. Finally, the general level of maturity of such a group vis-à-vis both their museum going experiences and their grasp of the concept of history itself, puts their results into a special category. However, this class had made a recent visit to Sagamore Hill about which they were obviously excited and their teacher pays special attention to local history with what appear to be excellent results. In short, this was not a typical 3rd grade group.

At the top of Table 1 is given the number of students in the group, broken down by gender. Also shown are the results of the initial question asked on these forms, which was to indicate one's level of interest in history, based on reading habits, TV viewing habits, museum visits, courses taken, etc., also broken down by gender. As noted above, it is probably not appropriate to try to draw any firm conclusions from these data. Note that the boys in this group show the least interest in history of any of the groups, with one boy admitting that he is "Not Interested" in history. In contrast, the girls showed the highest ratings of any of the three groups in their responses, 67% indicating that they are "Very Interested" in history (even higher than the Harvard tour group).

At the bottom of Table 1 are shown the percentage of answers given for each of the three ratings, column 1 being "Very Important," 2, "Kind of Important," and 3, "Not so Important." Again, the results are separated by gender. Thus, it is shown that 41% of the answers given by the boys were checked #1, or "Very Important", 42% "Kind of Important," etc. The girls show the same breakdown between the three categories of importance. Perhaps of particular interest are those items that are above the average for each category. For the boys this would include the date the person was born, different places they lived, achievements, political history, where, when and cause of death, and how they were rated by historians after their death. The girls agreed with only two of these, political history and cause of death. They added four of their own: period during which person lived, parental history, information about person's children, and letters the person wrote and received.

TABLE 1

FRONT-END EVALUATION SELF-RATING Form Results

Sagamore Hill - 3rd Grade Students

Level of Interest in History

Male (N=13):

Very Interested 38% Interested 38% Somewhat Interested 15% Not Interested 8%

Female (N=9):

Very Interested 67% Interested 22% Somewhat Interested 11% Not Interested 0%

What kinds of things do you think it is important to know about famous people in history? 1-Very Important; 2=Kind of Important; 3=Not So Important

Male			Female (9)		
1	2	3	1	2	3
5	8	0	6	3	0
4	8	1	1	8	0
8	4	1	3	3	3
5	7	1	4	3	2
5	5	3	5	4	0
5	7	1	5	4	0
6	3	4	4	5	0
3	7	3	4	3	2
4	6	3	4	3	2
9	4	0	4	3	2
7	5	1	5	4	0
6	7	0	4	1	4
4	9	0	4	4	1
3	6	4	2	3	4
3	5	5	4	5	0
4	3	6	5	2	2
6	4	3	4	3	2
5	3	5	3	6	0
4	6	3	4	5	0
5	5	3	4	5	0
7	5	1	6	3	0
8	4	1	2	5	2
7	4	2	4		2
41%	42%	17%	144%	42%	114%

Period during which person lived._____

Place the person was born._____

Date the person was born._____

Person's marital history. Person's

-parental history. Information about

person's children. Different places

person lived and how long._____

Travels they took._____

Person's occupational history._____

Achievements during their life._____

Person's political history._____

Awards, honors received: When_____

What For_____

Things -produced(books, music, art, etc.)_

Personal, life-style characteristics._

Letters they wrote and got._____

Gifts given to them._____

Scandals._____

Medical history._____

How treated by the media while living.

Cause of death._____

Where/when they died._____

How rated by historians after death._____

Reminded again of our interpretation caveat, one should note that the last three items could be said to have a particularly feminine "ring" to them, and alerts us to the fact that there may well be a distinction between the kinds of things that interest young boys and girls and (perhaps) adult men and women as well. Note that the "Letters" item got the highest "Not so Important" ratings by boys, along with another gender-loaded item, "Personal, Life-style Characteristics." (In hindsight, an item on "Military history" should have been included in the rating list. One would guess that it would have made even more explicit this gender distinction - which will be reinforced by the focus group results).

Mixed Family Groups (Table 2)

The extremely small number of persons in this group makes even a cautious interpretation of the Self-rating Form risky. Two items received all or a majority of the positive votes from both men and women: "Period during which the person lived," and "Personal, life style characteristics." Considered "Not So Important" by both men and women was "Gifts given to them."

Harvard University Tour Group (Table 3)

This is by far the most educated group in the study, and, at least for the females, one that has a sizable number of participants (18). As one might expect, the level of interest in history is very high for this group, with 100% of the men and 89% of the women either Very Interested or Interested in the subject. The women also had the highest percentage of items in the Very Important column (58%). Among those that were given this rating by the vast majority of women were: Period during which person lived; Date person was born; Person's occupational history; Achievements during their life (100%); Things produced; Personal, life style characteristics. Given the lowest ratings by the women were: Letters they wrote and got; Gifts given to them (the largest number of negative votes); Scandals.

Summary Data, All Groups (Table 4)

In an effort to put together what might be considered a composite of the different kinds of visitors (e.g., age, gender, education, level of interest) that are likely to come to see the TR exhibits, a summary table is provided that combines the three groups. Because the number of persons in this group is relatively large, the individual entries in Table 4 are given as percentages.

Again, at the bottom of this table are the relative frequencies with which each of the three ratings were used, expressed as percentages (48% Very Important; 37% kind of Important; 14% Not So Important). The salient findings from these data are represented by those items for which a higher than average percentage of respondents gave a particular answer. For example, while the average percentage of Very Important responses was 48%, 79% gave this rating to "Achievements during their life," representing the highest single positive rating. There are eight other items in this "higher than average" category and these have been identified on Table 4 by a single .

Similarly, there are nine items for which a higher than average "Not so Important" rating was given, and these are noted by a double **. However, it should be remembered that only 14% of the ratings given by all 52 respondents were in this category, so that, with one exception, none of these percentages reflect a very strong negative response.

To simplify the inspection of these critical items, they are listed (p. 4) along with their percentage ratings, with the "most different" rating at the top of the list.

TABLE 2

Front-End Evaluation Self- Rating Form Results

Sagamore Hill - Casual Visitors - Mixed Family_Groups

Level of Interest in

History Male (N=3 adults):

Very Interested 1 Interested 2 Somewhat

Interested 0 Not Interested 0

Female (N= 2 adults; 3 children):

Very Interested 2 Interested 3 Somewhat

Interested 0 Not Interested 0

What kinds of things do you think it is important to know about famous people in history? 1=Very Important; 2=Kind of Important; 3=Not So Important

Period during which person lived._____
Place the person was born._____
Date the person was born._____
Person's marital history._____
Person's Parental history._____
Information about Person's children._____
Different places Person lived and how long._____
Travels they took._____
Person's occupational history._____
Achievements during their life._____
Person's political history._____
Awards, honors received: When_____
What For_____
Things -produced(books, music, art, etc.)_____
Personal, life-style characteristics._____
Letters they wrote and got._____
Gifts given to them._____
Scandals._____
Medical history._____
How treated by the media while living._____
Cause of death._____
Where/when they died._____
How rated by historians after death.____

MALE (3)			FEMALE (5)		
1	2	3	1	2	3
3	0	0	5	0	0
1	1	1	2	3	0
1	2	0	1	4	0
2	1	0	2	2	1
1	2	0	1	4	0
2	1	0	2	3	0
0	3	0	3	2	0
0	2	1	2	3	0
2'	1	0	4	0	1
2	1	0	4	0	1
0	3	0	2	3	0
2	1	0	2	3	0
1	2	0	2	2	1
2	1	0	3	1	1
3	0	0	3	1	1
1	2	0	2	0	3
1	0	2	0	2	3
1	1	1	1	3	1
0	1	2	1	3	1
0	2	1	1	3	1
1	2	0	2	3	0
0	3	0	3	2	0
1	1	1	2	2	1
139	48%	13	43	43%	14%
%		%	%		

Table 3

Front-End Evaluation z Self-Rating Form Results

Sagamore Hill - Harvard UNIV. Tour Group

Level of Interest in History

Male (N=4):

Very Interested 50% Interested 50% Somewhat Interested 0 Not Interested 0

Female (N=18):

Very Interested 50% Interested 39% Somewhat Interested 11% Not Interested 0

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What kinds of things do you think it is important to know about famous people in history? 1=Very Important; 2=Kind of Important; 3=Not So Important

Period during which person lived.

Place the person was born.

Date the person was born.

Person's marital history.

Person's Parental history.

Information about Person's children.

Different places person lived and how long.

Travels they took.

Person's occupational history.

Achievements during their life.

Person's political history.

Awards, honors received: When

What For

Things -produced(books, music, art, etc.)

Personal, life-style characteristics.

Letters they wrote and got.

Gifts given to them.

Scandals.

Medical history.

How treated by the media while living.

Cause of death.

Where/when they died.

How rated by historians after death.

MALE (4)			FEMALE (18)		
1	2	3	1	2	3
3	1	0	17	1	0
1	2	1	12	4	2
1	2	1	13	5	0
2	1	1	12	6	0
2	1	1	11	6	1
2	2	0	8	9	1
3	1	0	9	8	1
2	1	1	9	7	2
4	0	0	14	4	0
4	0	0	18	0	0
2	2	0	12	2	4
1	0	3	8	6	4
2	1	1	9	7	2
4	0	0	14	4	0
3	0	1	13	4	1
2	0	2	6	9	3
0	0	4	5	6	7
2	1	1	5	8	5
1	2	1	9	9	0
1	2	1	9	4	5
1	2	1	9	7	2
0	2	2	9	7	2
2	2	0	8	6	4
49%	27%	24%	58%	31%	11%
		1		%	

Above Average

Very Important Items (Av.=48%)

- | | | |
|--|-------|----|
| 1. Achievements during their lifetime | (79%) | 2. |
| Period during which person lived | (75%) | |
| 3. Occupational history | (62%) | |
| 4. Person's life style characteristics | (56%) | 5. |
| Political history | (54%) | |
| 6. Things produced | (54%) | |
| 7. Date born | (52%) | |
| 8. Marital history | (52%) | |
| 9. Cause of death | (50%) | |

Above Average

Not So Important Items (Av.=14%)

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Gifts given to person | (40%) |
| 2. Letter written/received | (31%) |
| 3. Scandals | (25%) |
| 4. How treated by media while living | (21%) |
| 5. When awards/honors received | (21%) |
| 6. How rated by historians | (19%) |
| 7. Things produced | (17%) |
| 8. Travels | (17%) |
| 9. Person's life style characteristics | (15%) |

Note that two items manage to get on both lists, "Things produced" and "Person's life style characteristics," although they are at the low end of the Not so Important list and thus do not represent a serious division in what is or is not important to the three groups.

There is a clear pattern to these data that reflects a high interest in what is substantive about a person's life and the context in which it was lived, and a corresponding low interest in what is trivial and peripheral. The one exception to these trends in the data is the item "Person's life style characteristics," which received a fairly high rating (56%). However, in the light of the other ratings (e.g., the low rating for "Scandals") one should not interpret this as an invitation to sensationalize or "look for skeletons in the closet!"

Especially noteworthy is the emphasis given to the "Period during which person lived" (75%). This high rating reinforces the notion that TR's life should be linked to other important historical events, both national and international, in a simple and informative way (time line?).

TABLE 4 **Front-End Evaluation** **Self-Rating Form Results**

Sagamore Hill - Summary Data. All Groups

Level of Interest in History (N=52):

Very Interested 48% Interested 40% Somewhat Interested 10% Not Interested 2%

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What kinds of things do you think it is important to know about famous people in history?

	VERY IMPORTANT	KIND OF IMPORTANT	NOT SO IMPORTANT
Period during which person lived (*)_____	75%	25%	0%
Place the person was born_____	40%	50%	10%
Date the person was born (*)_____	52%	38%	10%
Person's marital history (*)_____	52%	38%	10%
Person's parental history_____	48%	42%	10%
Information about person's children_____	46%	50%	4%
Different places person lived/how long_____	48%	42%	10%
Travels then took (**)_____	38%	44%	17%
Person's occupational history (*)_____	62%	27%	11%
Achievements during their life (*)_____	79%	15%	6%
Person's political history (*)_____	54%	36%	10%
Awards, honors received: When (**)_____	44%	35%	21%
_____What For_____	42%	48%	10%
Things produced (music, books art) (*) (**)_____	54%	29%	17%
Personal, life-style characteristics (*) (**)_____	56%	29%	15%
Letters they wrote and got (**)_____	38%	31%	31%
Gifts given to them (**)_____	31%	29%	40%
Scandals (**)_____	33%	42%	25%
Medical history_____	36%	50%	13%
How treated by the media while living_(**)	38%	40%	21%
Cause of death (*)_____	50%	42%	8%
Where/when they died _____	42%	44%	13%
How rated by historians after death (**)_____	46%	35%	19%
	48%	37%	14%

(*) = Above Average In "Very Important."

(**) = Above Average In "Not So Important."

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

A tape recording was made of each of the focus group sessions. The results/transcripts that follow represent what was said along with an attempt to capture the "flavor" of the comments being made (e.g., group enthusiasm, or lack thereof, the amount of discussion generated by a particular topic, etc.). However, it is not possible in every case to judge how the total group felt about a subject. The real value of the focus group format lies in its creative generation of ideas and thoughts, some of which may have great value and some of which may have lesser value. As usual, it is important that project team members read these materials and note those areas that have special meaning and relevance in terms of the preparation of the TR exhibition.

As a part of this process, following each transcript is a commentary that reflects what appears to be salient from the point of view of the focus group leader and evaluator.

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Tape Transcript-Third Grade Students, Theodore Roosevelt Elementary school, oyster Bay, NY

Male = 13; Female = 9

(Began by explaining to the group the purpose of our wanting to talk to them about Sagamore in particular and museum exhibits in general. Chris Dearing was co-chair during this session.)

What did you think of your visit to the TR museum when you went there recently?

Responses were affectively very positive (exciting, interesting, loved it) but cognitively rather weak. One girl remembered a doll. A boy remembered a flag and cannon. Another boy remembered a piece of an airplane where his "son was killed," and a death mask of TR. When asked which war his son was killed in the answer was "WWII." which was not challenged. The cannon came up again in probing for "things they remembered."

In general they thought that they spent about one hour in the museum. Some said more, some less.

As the conversation went on. a number of students brought up more and more things they remembered seeing, but the overall impression is one of a limited and very "object oriented" set of impressions.

The response to the question about any differences that might exist in what boys and girls are interested drew a loud and excited response - there ARE differences, and they seemed to be along the gender lines that one might expect. Mentioned were clothes and dresses (girls) and tools and war things (boys). Also noted by a girl was the struggle for equal rights that women had to endure. (The implication was that girls would be interested in learning about this but boys would not.) A boy thought that boys would be more interested in horror movies than girls, but several girls took exception to this.

The conversation came back to the idea that girls and boys would tend to be attracted to different things in a museum, and that boys would tend to be drawn to

anything that had to do with war (one boy said "weaponry"!)). A girl added the idea that boys would be more interested in TR's hunting trips where he killed wild animals.

When asked if they would be interested in things related to politics, there was a general negative response. The group was much more positive about things that TR produced, like books. (This is in contrast to the answers given on the Self-rating form to this question, which tended to be in the "Kind Of" or "Not So" important columns.)

The contrast between TR's interest in conservation and his killing animals on his hunting trips did not generate much discussion. However, one boy noted that it would be okay to kill an animal if it was attacking you but that otherwise they "have a right to live." This brought up the interesting idea that "back then" people didn't have much to eat and so that was why he had to hunt.

This led to the question as to the social status of TR. They seemed to understand that he and his family were very well off. They would not need to hunt in order to eat.

The group seemed to be amused by the story about TR's cigar smoking - that it was recommended by his doctors to help his severe case of asthma. (This "trivial" bit of "history" may not be high on the historian's list of important things to include in such an exhibit, but it is an example of the kinds of things that could be used to "lighten up" the exhibit. Both adults and children would be amused by this story - and it says something about the state of the art in medical science at that period!)

The group was asked to comment on the use of motion pictures that would show TR doing various things in his lifetime - how important would it be to include real images of TR in the exhibit? A show of hands indicated a generally positive response (well over half the group). However, one girl spoke up and said that "These would be in black-and-white, though." This led to a call for a vote as to whether or not the use of early, black-and-white movies would be a problem for them. Most indicated that it would - only 5 voted that it would not be a problem. However, one boy thought strongly that films would have "more meaning" if they were "the real thing." The idea that a modern, color film could be made in which actors would play the role of TR, etc., was rejected by most in the group.

The group seemed to be easily swayed one way or the other on this important question. They obviously associate a TV screen with colorful and exciting images, and need to think about how to balance that against the idea of seeing "real" people doing "real" things in a less exciting-looking but historically authentic format. My guess is that this age group would probably be a "tough sell" for the most part as far as original footage is concerned - but that should not be allowed to diminish its value for older age groups.

When asked what their favorite museums are, science museums came up in the general discussion most often. When asked why they like science museums so much the answers had most to do with the fact that there were things to do in them - experiments, computers, hands-on stuff. To get a better handle on their preferences, I asked them to choose by a show of hands the one museum they would go to out of a list of five - science, art, natural history, history, and zoo. The results are:

Natural history (I defined it for them) - 2
Science - 9
History - 7
Zoo - 5 Art -
0

The high response to the history category is no doubt a reflection of the emphasis put on this subject at this school and at their grade level. Their recent trip to the TR museum and their classroom discussion about that trip and about the focus group session gave them a "history bias" that may not be reflected in other schools.

As things were winding down the notion of a time line came up several times. This seemed to be something they had talked about in class and was a way they thought TR's life could be represented, perhaps along with other historical events. This is a potentially powerful notion, since we know from other studies that people, and especially young people, do not have a sense of time and place when confronted with historical information.

Another idea that had considerable interest to the group was the use of a talking person, or talking head, with TR represented by an animated figure. The group seemed to find famous quotes of TR to be of great value - they had even written out many of them on papers that they showed us. A number of the students had memorized some of them and said them out loud to the group. The idea that they could "see" TR actually saying these things had a lot of appeal to them.

The importance and value of showing "real things" also came up for positive comment during this discussion - things TR used, wore (e.g., uniforms), etc.

This led to the related topic of reading about such objects on labels. While they did not reject all reading, they clearly thought that objects should carry most of the message. "If you need to read, it should be very brief."

These children may be in a "pre-interpretive" age group, where objects alone are enough ("Fun just to look at real cannon."). If you must "explain" it, just a few words should be enough. (One can't help but think that TV viewing has something to do with this anti-reading bias.)

One student remembered going to a science museum that asked questions and you had to lift a panel to find the answer. When the group was asked to "vote" on this, most said it was a good idea. (Again, we know from previous studies that these flip panels have very high attracting power for all age groups). Another comment noted the use of game-like devices with lights or sound to let you know if you got the right answer.

When asked for a final comment, the time line came up again. Also, they did not like the idea of being given a lot of information about the subject matter of a museum visit by their teacher before the visit. They wanted to be surprised. However, giving them questions to think about and find answers to in the exhibits was fine, as was having a post-visit discussion in the classroom.

One girl kept saying "gift shop" over and over. I guess a visit to a museum without time (and money!) to spend in the gift shop is a no-no, even at this tender age! (I will NOT comment on the fact that it was a girl who brought this topic up.)

Upon completion of the session with the aid grade students, as described above, three 3rd grade teachers agreed to be interviewed briefly. We had only about 15 minutes to talk with them, so we could not cover the range of questions we would have liked, but the following represents what they had to say about museum visits and exhibits from the child's perspective:

The video that is at the museum now is much too sophisticated for the children. I liked it, but it was not suitable for that age group.

Too much reading to do in the museum. That's hard for the children to do. The house most of them liked.

I do the house first and then the film and at that point you are dealing with attention span. I usually make the museum visit very, very short. Most of the children are running through the two rooms in the museum.

The docent who takes them around is critical. Jim Foote (?) was excellent. (This name came up several times - enthusiastically - in the children's focus group as well.) Often the children can't even hear what the guide or teacher is saying - only those next to them can hear anything.

A lot of the children like the pictures but they could not read the captions. We would try to read them to them but a lot of them would walk away and look at the pictures.

If they could press a button and hear a short audio, that would be much better.

Time is so short. Some kids are trying to look at something but you have to drag them to the next room to keep on schedule.

I think the kids would be better off going with their family so they can stay as long as they want and do the things they like most.

Kids get excited about anything interactive.

If there was some kind of a model that would get their attention - like a life-sized model of a bear.

Hearing TR's voice would be good - Jim Foote could do it. (Apparently he dressed up like TR and he had to keep reminding the kids that he was not really TR. At the age level we are dealing with here there seems to be lots of opportunities to confuse and mislead the children!)

I noted that in our discussion with the kids the notion of "time line" kept coming up. These teachers thought that historic time was too sophisticated a concept for this age group. (They do use time lines in later grades apparently. The hall walls in the school have time lines on them.)

The teacher whose class we used for the focus group stayed after the other teachers left to get feedback on what happened with his class, what they had to say, etc. He made a good point about the reading problem that came up so often in our discussion - have different levels of text, with the important information in a short and easy-to read format, followed by more detail for the higher age groups. Of course, this notion has been promoted in the museum world for a long time, but in the context of this museum and this age group, it has much to recommend it. (As Chris pointed out, it is an idea that the Park Service tries to incorporate in its exhibits.)

Another good point - what would be interesting to 8-year-olds would be things like having animals in the White House, and all the children TR had and how he related to them. (The "cigar" story comes to mind again in this context.) In short, there are a number of topics that could be incorporated into the exhibits that would have special (but not exclusive!) appeal to this age group.

Comments

one could not help but be impressed by the spontaneous enthusiasm of this group of children. With very few exceptions, they all entered into the discussion (sometimes all at once!) and seemed to really enjoy talking about museums, and especially Sagamore Hill and TR.

While they do not represent the age level of the younger target audience that was initially identified (Junior HS or HS), their thoughts and ideas are worth noting and taking into consideration in planning for the new exhibits.

Their recent trip to Sagamore Hill obviously had a positive impact on them in terms of having an enjoyable experience. It was harder to find out how the experience added to their specific knowledge of TR. However, as the discussion progressed it became more obvious that there were things they remembered (although not always accurately - one boy knew that TR's son was killed in a war but had the wrong war). Such "nuggets" were, however, isolated bits of information rather than any kind of coherent story-line.

In general the things that attracted them tended to be "real" things, and in the boy's case, things that related to TR's war and hunting experiences. This pattern is perhaps the most significant (but obvious) finding to come out of this focus group. There is clearly a gender division of interest even at this age level and it is readily acknowledged to exist by both boys and girls, although the girls seemed to be more articulate (and loud) on this subject. Of course, this comes as no surprise to anyone, but it presents a special challenge to the exhibit planners and designers if they expect to get a high level of attention from both sexes.

It should be noted in this connection that the girls were at least as interested in history as the boys, based on their self-rating form results and their level of participation in the focus group discussion.

There seemed to be strong support at this age level for the use of visuals, although it was not possible to get total agreement on just what kind of visuals. They seemed to agree that there is a role for authenticity in the use of visuals (as well as other things) even when they may not represent state-of-the-art production values. This may be a reflection of the positive "real thing" phenomenon that kept coming up. On the other hand, they voted 17 to 5 against the use of "old movies" of TR. This finding may also be an example of the questions themselves exceeding the experience level of this group.

It is worthy of note that when asked what their favorite museums were that science museums (actually *science centers* is a better description of most of them) were first on their list, although history museums were a close second (their recent trip to Sagamore may account for a lot of this positive feeling about these museums). In any case, the reason for science centers coming out on top clearly had to do with the amount of interactive, hands-on types of activities typically found in their exhibits.

The several (and surprising) references to time lines by this group should be noted. It may be expecting too much to think that this age level can grasp the "sweep of history" (e.g., WW I vs. WW II), but the general agreement among all the groups that "the period during which the person lived" is extremely important lends support to seriously considering the inclusion of key contemporaneous events in the coverage of TR's life.

The subject of reading labels in exhibits drew a general negative reaction. The feeling expressed was that it is "things" that are important, and you really should

not have to read a lot about them. The use of questions and flip panels got general support. So did the idea of "talking heads." Of course, here again the age level of this group must be kept in mind.

The short discussion that we were able to have with several elementary teachers after the focus group was over was generally in support of and consistent with what the children had to say.

Another "take" on the use of text in exhibits was made by the teacher whose class we used.- write labels at different levels so that the younger children can get the main idea of the exhibit without having to digest lots of words. This is an "old" idea that is seldom used, and thought should be given to its incorporation in the planned exhibits.

Tape Transcript-Casual Visitors, Mixed Family

Male = 3 Adults; Female = 2 Adults, 3 Children

These two family groups were asked to participate in the focus group discussion in return for free passes to the TR home. (They were scheduled for a 2PM tour which gave less than one hour to complete the discussion.) One group lived in nearby Conn. and consisted of a husband and wife and two female pre-teen children; the other group was from Queens and consisted of a husband, wife, one pre-teen female and one unidentified male who spoke little English. (He had difficulty completing the Self Rating Form and made no comments during the discussion.) All adults had at least some college education. Chris Dearing was co-chair.

There was general agreement that museums should not become too entertainment oriented but still should be interesting and have things to do (interactive, computer, etc.). The Holocaust Museum was noted as an example of one that was both very informative and interesting.

Pictures of TR's early life are good - show where he was born and grew up. There is a The program on the presidents that is very interesting and they show these things very well. A kind of time line would be good showing what else is happening in the world.

Using old film footage is good. It has an authenticity to it.

You could start out your museum visit with a short introductory film of maybe 10 min. This would give basic orientation to TR.

It is always good to get information about where things are, and so on.

The museum should not just cover TR's successes and accomplishments but also problems he had. It should make him seem "real." Everyone has hard times and makes mistakes.

However, one should not go too far with the negative side. If people want to delve into his complete life there are plenty of books they can read.

Husband and wife from Queens had a small disagreement on this subject. She felt that you would be cheating the public if you left out major problem area. He said you can't please everybody so you do the best you can. There will always be some people who are unhappy with the way you do it.

Just tell people the truth - they will find out anyway. Controversial subjects are fine (like TR's hunting) but don't editorialize about it. (From the other male husband.)

The museum should be laid out chronologically and have lots of quotes from TR.

I like reading better than listening to audio. (Conn. adult female.) The notion of providing different levels of text was given some approval. Also, the "talking head" idea was seen as an attention getter, especially at the beginning of the exhibit area as an introduction.

What about having people dressed up in period dress like Williamsburg?

One young person said she preferred tours for things like historic houses but would rather go through a museum on her own or with her family.

The notion of combining an historic house with a museum was raised. Todd Lincoln's house (in Manchester, VT) was noted twice in this context. Apparently the house contains museum-like displays ("You open a closet door and there is Mr. Lincoln's top hat along with other things.")

The young girl from Queens (about 10 and very shy) said she went to the Cooper Hewitt museum on a school tour. She said it was "fun" and she "learned something." There was no preparation for the visit.

In re-addressing the problems connected with too much reading material, it was noted that the trouble with audio is that you often start in the middle of it. Someone else started it running and then you come in. There needs to be more information about how long it is, etc.

The chronological idea came up again, with a vote for having a linear path or layout through the exhibit area and some kind of orientation letting the visitor know about how it is organized. Chris noted that people can have the choice to follow the "plan" or to wander about anyway they want. But they can make this decision based on information they get beforehand. The group approved of this notion.

Everyone agreed that it is extremely important to cover not only what TR accomplished during his lifetime but his legacy - what he initiated that had lasting impact.

Comments

The comments about the value of using old film footage were made by the adults in the group. There was quite a bit of discussion about how much should be said about a person's life that may be derogatory. The question came down to just how important such information is in order to have a proper understanding of that person (clearly a judgment call).

The flavor I got from this discussion is that since all people (especially famous ones!) have some negative or controversial aspects to their lives, for the sake of authenticity exhibits about them should be explicit and recognize them. This makes the other parts of the exhibit more believable.

Perhaps a good example in connection with TR is his love of both hunting and the environment. An important historical point could be made here about how misleading it can be to judge a person's past behavior on the basis of current knowledge and attitudes. (E.g., the notion that it may be possible to actually extinguish an entire species was unheard of in TR's time.)

Another important point that this group seemed to feel strongly about is the importance of providing casual visitors with information about the exhibit before they enter. An introductory film was specifically mentioned by one person and head nodding among the group suggests general support for this "revolutionary" idea. This notion, they agreed, would apply, as well to things like films and audio where it would help to know how long they run, time remaining, etc.

Finally, the idea that the TR exhibit should be organized along chronological lines had lots of support, along with letting the visitor know in advance (e.g., in "the film") that this is the way it is done. Such a path through the exhibit would be clearly indicated, but the casual visitor would also be free to wander about any way they desire.

Sagamore Hill - Harvard University Tour Group

Male = 4, Female = 18

We were able to "capture" this group after they toured the house. They were a highly educated (mostly graduate degrees) and well-traveled group of mostly women, all middle-aged or "above" and all with professional careers. Chris Dearing co-chaired.

What kinds of museums do you like? What are some museums that stand out as particularly enjoyable and interesting? Mentioned were The Holocaust museum, the Ellis Island museum, Colonial Williamsburg, and Hyde Park. Added to the list was Churchill's war room and bunker in London.

Audio adds a lot to the experience, especially if it is of the real persons.

The group was also very positive about the use of real film footage, even if it is black and white and not "perfect."

A comment about Ellis Island - I liked it better before they upgraded it with modern exhibits. It had a feel to it that was realistic and authentic. There was a general feeling that the use of interactive and computer-driven exhibits may be going in the wrong direction. Museums should not put too much emphasis on "entertainment."

The Newseum in Wash. was also noted. Especially liked was being able to see actual newspapers from different periods of US history (in pull-out drawers). That this is noted instead of all the high tech stuff that this museum has is very interesting. Here again, the "real thing" flavor, even if its just a newspaper, over the contrived thing, is coming over very strong. Continuing this point - "Personal items are of particular interest to me." (Adult female.)

Things that would make the TR story interesting - his life was full of contradictions - he hunted and yet he also cared for the environment. Today you have to be one or the other, but he was both. He went to war and yet he bridged the peace between Russia and Japan. His genealogy is also interesting - his connection with FDR. (Comments by adult male.)

Should an exhibit mention conflicts in one's life? A strong positive reaction to this idea from the group. "An exhibit should not be one-sided. Humanize the exhibit. I always like it when I can identify with the person and see that in many ways they are just like me, practical jokes he played on people, what kind of father he was." (Adult female.)

The complex issues that were noted earlier are still with us - we have sportsmen's groups who fight against conservationists. These are not just of historical interest but are contemporary issues that we hear about every day.

The hunting theme came up again - it is because he was a hunter that he appreciated nature. It is not a contradiction, it is a paradox. (Harvard talk?) This part of Long Island was a hunting ground for the Indians. A hundred years ago it never occurred to anyone that we could wipe out an entire species. We must put these things in their proper context and not judge TR by our standards today.

The Bio-Diversity exhibit at the Natural History Museum in NY was great but too much to do in the time we had. You could actually E-Mail things to yourself from computer terminals in the exhibit, which allowed you to get things that you did not have time to read while there.

Comments

This was the most articulate of the three groups, and by far the best educated. Unfortunately, they had relatively little time to devote to the discussion due to their tour schedule. They were also eating lunch, a unique distraction that may have reduced their level of participation. However, their comments are not inconsistent with those made by the mixed family group and even, with some adjustments made for level of sophistication, the 3rd grade group.

It is interesting that the museums they noted as being among their favorites were all historical museums rather than "high tech" museums like science centers. Ellis Island was noted as being more interesting before it was "modernized."

Related to this notion was the repeated emphasis on authenticity. Real voices and real photos and film footage are more powerful communicators than "fake" ones. Even in the Newseum in DC, it was being able to see actual newspapers that were produced during times of national crises or notable events that deeply impressed one lady, not the very sophisticated electronic gadgetry that is there in abundance.

Another theme of this discussion was the importance of making exhibits that reflect a person's actual life and not some sanitized or "one sided" version of it. I liked the use of the word "humanize" to describe this approach. This gives each visitor something to identify with. The use of humor in this connection should not be underrated. Of course, such comments beg the question of just exactly what should be included in the way of controversial material. This group had no trouble with the role of hunting in TR's life as long as it was presented in context. Similarly, his peace-making and war-making activities need to be presented and provide additional opportunities for making good historical points.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings presented in the previous sections of this report contain many suggestions that relate to the proposed TR exhibition and they should be considered the primary source of information about what casual visitors would be likely to respond to/pay attention to, and what they would not. As in all cases where there is more content to present than there is space available to present it, difficult choices must be made. It is in making these choices that the results of this front end evaluation can be most helpful.

Several themes come out of these findings that could be considered as broad guidelines in shaping the exhibition. Again, they are not substitutes for the more detailed comments that have already been made.

1. The overall organization of the TR exhibit would be most easily comprehended if it were presented in a chronological manner, and if this schema was made clear to the visitor right from the beginning. This ties in with two corollary themes, the need for some kind of orientation to the exhibition as the visitor enters (text, film, slides, talking head, etc.) and the need to make this plan explicit as the visitor moves throughout the exhibit. However, this linear presentation should not inhibit visitors from "designing" their own path through the exhibition if they wish to do so. (E.g., repeat visitors may not want to "do" everything, but select certain things or areas of special interest to them.)
2. Related to the above, there is a need to show how the deeds and events that are presented in the exhibition are related to/connected to other significant events happening in the US and the world at the same time. This is especially important for the younger visitor, but would be of great help to all visitors. The time-line notion came up several times in this connection but this may or may not be the best way to meet this requirement. (Here is where "ideas" can overwhelm the planning process. We know that dates alone are not enough. Showing the names of presidents who came immediately before and after TR is another obvious but weak approach. This area may be a good candidate for the formative testing phase of the evaluation process!)
3. Another notion related to the above, but at the object level, is "context." It is not safe to assume that any object has enough intrinsic interest to the typical visitor that it can stand on its own. (Even the Hope diamond needs to be "interpreted.") Not only must objects be given meaning that relates to the subject matter of the exhibit, but, whenever possible, meaning that relates to the visitor. This notion came through in many different ways from the focus group participants, often in the context of making the exhibition "interesting" and "enjoyable." TR's life has so many points-of-contact with the contemporary world that this should not be difficult to do. (To name just a few - conservation, hunting and right to own guns, women and equal rights, devotion to the family, role of US as a world power and using that power to stop foreign wars.) These are all "hooks" that can be used to make connections between TR, objects, and the visitor. The use of humor in this connection should be given special attention. The cigar story comes to mind - even the Young children thought this was funny. It is also an example of how the exhibit can be connected to current concerns, (smoking and cancer), and context (TR was actually following medical advice that was considered valid at that time).
4. The notion of "authenticity" came through in so many different ways that it deserves its own status as a theme. Related ideas are "truth" and "real." Connected to these notions is the question of presenting negative or controversial aspects of TR's life. The answer was very clear -if these things had an impact on him as a leader and as a person, then they should be presented. But, "muckraking" and trivial gossip have no place in such an exhibition. Of course, this kind of guidance still